

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the South Somerset Local Plan Review

Non-Technical Summary

South Somerset District Council

June 2019

Quality information

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in support of South Somerset District Council's early review of the Local Plan. SA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of a Draft Plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating adverse effects and maximising the positives. SA of Local Plans is a legal requirement.
- 1.2 At the current time, the Local Plan Review 'Preferred Options Document' is published in-line with Regulation 18 of the Local Planning Regulations, and the 'Interim SA Report' is published alongside. This is a Non-technical Summary (NTS) of the Interim SA Report.
- 1.3 The legally required SA Report will be published subsequently, alongside the final draft ('Proposed Submission/ Publication') version of the Local Plan, under Regulation 19 of the Local Planning Regulations.

Structure of the SA Report/ this NTS

- 1.4 SA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:
 1. What has plan-making / SA involved up to this point?
 - Including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.
 2. What are the appraisal findings at this current stage?
 - i.e. in relation to the Draft Plan.
 3. What happens next?
 - What steps will be taken to finalise (and monitor) the plan?
- 1.5 Each of these questions is answered in turn below. Firstly though there is a need to set the scene further by answering the questions i) What is the plan trying to achieve?; and ii) What is the scope of the SA?

What is the plan seeking to achieve?

- 1.6 The South Somerset Local Plan Review (LPR) will provide a refreshed policy framework that will guide and shape development in the District up to 2036. The Local Plan Review will replace the current South Somerset Local Plan (2006-2028), adopted in March 2015.
- 1.7 The LPR rolls the plan period forward covering the timeframe 2016-2036, and considers the settlement strategy, housing and economic growth requirements, site allocations, and a series of topic-based policies that will be used to assess planning applications. Adoption is anticipated to be at the end of 2020.

Plan vision and objectives

- 1.8 The Vision to 2036 is as follows:

"South Somerset will be a thriving, attractive, healthy and socially inclusive place to live, work, study and visit. A place where businesses flourish and become more productive, communities are safe, vibrant and healthy, where residents enjoy good housing and cultural, leisure and sporting activities. It will have sustainable, low carbon towns with enhanced infrastructure of all types and improved public transport links. The District will have high quality distinctive, historic, urban and rural environments, with vital and vibrant town centres with regeneration plans in Yeovil, Chard and Wincanton successfully accomplished. It will have a prosperous and productive economy building on existing strengths and provide a choice of high quality housing

options for all. Inequality between urban and rural areas will be reduced with improved digital accessibility. The role of South Somerset as a gateway to the South West will be enhanced”.

1.9 The objectives of the Local Plan Review are derived from the Council Plan and the NPPF. The Strategic Objectives form the overall strategic approach by which the Vision for South Somerset will be achieved and are as follows:

1. Delivering a sufficient supply of homes: Promote sufficient high quality housing in sustainable locations, of a size, density and tenure required to meet the needs of the residents of South Somerset, delivered through a sustainable settlement strategy and hierarchy.
2. Building a strong, competitive economy: To establish an environment where there is sustainable economic growth in South Somerset, where all new and existing businesses both urban and rural can invest, where they are supported, can flourish, be competitive and become more productive.
3. Ensuring the vitality of town centres: Support and sustain a hierarchy of vital and vibrant town centres across the District to be the focus for commercial, retail and leisure uses and to deliver planned regeneration proposals in Yeovil, Chard and Wincanton town centres.
4. Promoting healthy and safe communities: Create a health enhancing, socially interactive, safe environment through the promotion of walking, cycling and non-car based transport and design. This will enable access to leisure opportunities, sports facilities, local shops, health care facilities, meeting places, open spaces, green infrastructure and other local services with a clear legible and integrated approach to locating housing, economic uses, services and facilities.
5. Promoting sustainable transport: Working with partners to address the impact of development on transport networks and maximising the opportunities from existing or proposed transport infrastructure such as the planned improvements to the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester and the A358 Taunton to Southfields. Supporting the use of non-carbon fuel cars and commercial vehicles.
6. Supporting high quality communications: In both rural and urban areas, to support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections.
7. Making effective use of land: Promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions.
8. Achieving well designed places: Support the creation of high quality buildings and places responding to local distinctive character and setting through the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials.
9. Meeting the challenge of climate change and flooding: Promote the reuse of resources, the principles of sustainable construction and the use of new technologies to combat and adapt to climate change to minimise impact of all new development on the environment. Help to achieve the national aim of reducing the carbon budget by 57% below 1990 levels by 2030¹.
10. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment: Protection and enhancement of our distinctive natural environment, valued landscapes and biodiversity, retaining the distinctiveness of settlements and taking account of known environmental constraints, including flood risk, and noise and air pollution in distributing growth.
11. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment: To sustain and enhance the significance of the District's distinctive heritage assets, recognising the character they bring to places, and the wider social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits the conservation of the historic environment can bring.

¹ Current Government Policy is to reduce the carbon budget to 57% below 1990 levels by 2030. This is based on update advice from the Climate Change Committee in June 2016.

What is the scope of the SA?

- 1.10 The scope of the SA is essentially reflected in a list of sustainability objectives, developed subsequent to a 'scoping' process (which included consultation on the scope of the SA in December 2016). Taken together, these objectives indicate the parameters of SA, and provide a methodological 'framework' for appraisal.

Table 1: SA Objectives

SA Objectives	Appraisal questions
Communities (including Housing)	
To meet the housing needs of all residents and different communities.	Will the option/proposal help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide sufficient housing to meet the identified needs of all Communities within South Somerset?• Provide an appropriate mix of types of housing to meet the identified needs of all communities within South Somerset?• Provide an opportunity to help meet housing needs arising from outside the Plan area?
To maintain and enhance community and settlement identities.	
To improve accessibility to services and facilities.	
Relevant SEA Topics: Population and Human Health	
Relevant NPPF Paragraphs: 47-78	
Economy and Employment	
To support the economy and ensure that there are suitable opportunities for employment.	Will the option/proposal help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide sufficient high quality employment land to meet the identified needs of all communities within South Somerset?• Facilitate the provision of the right type of employment land in the right place?• Safeguard existing employment land in South Somerset?• Support and enhance the vitality and viability of Town Centres, in particular Dunstable Town Centre?• Regenerate or provide employment opportunities in areas that are currently experiencing high rates of unemployment or deprivation?• Enhance the provision of education and training facilities?• Support the visitor economy?• Facilitate working from home, remote working and home-based businesses?
Relevant SEA Topics: Population & Human Health	
Relevant NPPF Paragraphs: 18-22, 42 & 43	
Health and Equalities	
To improve the health and wellbeing of communities and reduce inequalities	Will the option/proposal help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote accessibility to a range of leisure, health and community facilities for all age groups?• Encourage healthy lifestyles and reduce health inequalities?• Enhance multifunctional green infrastructure networks in South Somerset and in the surrounding areas?• Provide and enhance the provision of community access to open space, green infrastructure and recreational areas?• Provide development in the most deprived areas and stimulate regeneration?• Provide equality of opportunity for all protected groups?
Relevant SEA Topics: Population and Health	
Relevant NPPF Paragraphs: 69-78	
Transport and Movement	

To maintain and improve the existing highway network, encourage a demonstrable modal shift and reduce the need to travel.

Relevant SEA Topics:
Population and Human Health

Relevant NPPF Paragraphs:
29-41

Will the option/proposal help to:

- Reduce the need to travel through sustainable patterns of land use and development?
- Improve access to and quality of sustainable transport modes for all communities, to allow sustainable movement not only within South Somerset but into the surrounding areas?
- Enable transport infrastructure improvements?
- Facilitate working from home and remote working?
- Provide improvements to and/or reduced congestion on the existing highway network?
- Support or enhance the local ambitions for transport?
- Does the option offer an opportunity to support the delivery of proposed transport infrastructure, such as the East West Rail Link?

Energy and Climate Change

To promote climate change mitigation and support resilience to the potential effects of climate change.

Relevant SEA Topics:
Climatic Factors

Relevant NPPF Paragraphs:
93-104

Will the option/proposal:

- Reduce energy consumption and increase efficiency?
- Promote the use of energy from low carbon sources?
- Ensure that new development is resilient to the effects of climate change?
- Improve green infrastructure networks in the Plan area (and beyond) to support adaptation to the potential effects of climate change?

Water Resources, Quality and Flooding

To minimise the demand for water and maintain or improve water quality.

Relevant SEA Topics:
Water

Relevant NPPF Paragraphs:
99-125

Will the option/proposal help to:

- Minimise water consumption?
- Protect and improve the area's chemical and biological water quality?
- Protect surface and groundwater resources?

To reduce the risk of flooding from all sources.

Relevant SEA Topics:
Water

Relevant NPPF Paragraphs:
99-125

Will the option/proposal help to:

- Direct development away from areas at highest risk of flooding as per the sequential test, taking into account the likely effects of climate change?
- Make development safe where it is necessary within an area of flood risk and without increasing flood risk elsewhere?
- Sustainably manage water run-off, ensuring that the risk of flooding is not increased and where possible reduced?
- Improve green infrastructure networks in South Somerset (and beyond) to support adaptation to the potential effects of climate change?
- Safeguard land to manage flood risk?

Soil and Land

To protect and conserve soil.

Relevant SEA Topics:
Soil.

Relevant NPPF Paragraphs:
109-125

Will the option/proposal help to:

- Promote the use of previously developed land?
- Avoid the use of land classified as best and most versatile agricultural land?

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Will the option/proposal help to:

Relevant SEA Topics:
Biodiversity, fauna and flora

Relevant NPPF Paragraphs:
109-125

- Avoid, or if not minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites, and provide net gains where possible?
- Protect and enhance ecological networks, including those that cross administrative boundaries?
- Protect the important geodiversity of South Somerset?

Landscape and Townscape

Landscape and Townscape.

Relevant SEA Topics:
Landscape

Relevant NPPF Paragraphs:
109-125

Will the option/proposal help to:

- Protect and where possible enhance nationally and locally designated landscapes and their setting?
- Protect and where possible enhance the overall rural landscape character of South Somerset?
- Regenerate previously developed land or restore derelict sites such as disused market gardens, former quarries or pits?

Historic Environment

To protect and enhance the significance of the historic environment, heritage assets and their settings.

Relevant SEA Topics:
Cultural Heritage

Relevant NPPF Paragraphs:
6-10, 126-141

Will the option/proposal help to:

- Protect and where possible, enhance designated and non-designated heritage assets and their setting?
- Protect and where possible, enhance conservation areas?
- Protect and where possible, enhance the wider historic environment?
- Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic environment?

2. Plan-making / SA up to this point

- 2.1 Local plan-making has been underway since 2015, with a wide range of evidence produced to inform the development of the Local Plan. **Table 2.1** sets out the key Local Plan and SA Documents published along with dates for consultation. The Local Plan documents and the evidence base (including the SA Reports) can be viewed and downloaded on the Council's website.

Table 2.1 Local Plan and SA stages

Local Plan Documents & Consultation	SA Documents & Consultation
	SA Scoping Report Sent to statutory consultees for consultation in December 2016
Issues and Options Consultation Document (Reg 18) Public consultation from October 2017 and January 2018	Initial SA Report Public consultation from October 2017 and January 2018
Preferred Options Consultation (Reg 18) Public consultation from June to September 2019	This Interim SA Report and NTS Public consultation from June to September 2019

- 2.2 Rather than recap the entire 'story' in detail, the intention here is to explain the work undertaken in 2018/ 19, which led to the development of the Preferred Options document that is currently the focus of appraisal (see Chapter 3, below) and currently published under Local Planning Regulation 18. Specifically, in-line with regulatory requirements (Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations), there is a need to explain how work was undertaken to develop and then appraise reasonable alternatives, and how the Council then took into account appraisal findings when finalising the draft plan for publication.
- 2.3 This part of the report presents information regarding the consideration of reasonable alternatives. This information is important given regulatory requirements.

Establishing the Reasonable Alternatives

- 2.4 The evidence around housing supply indicates that, as of March 2018, there have been 1,179 dwellings already built since the beginning of the plan period (2016). A further 5,813 dwellings have been granted planning permission. The total supply is therefore 6,992 dwellings.
- 2.5 Based on this standard method and the 2014-based household projections, the housing need figure for the plan period is calculated as 716 (rounded) dwellings per annum or 14,322 (rounded) dwellings during the plan period. In line with the NPPF, a suitable buffer on the housing need figure will also be required in order to provide flexibility.
- 2.6 Take the housing supply away and we are left with a shortfall or residual housing requirement of at least 7,330 dwellings (not including a buffer) during the life of the Local Plan Review. The HELAA identified 133 housing sites and 24 mixed use sites as being suitable, achievable and deliverable with the potential to deliver around 12,540 dwellings².
- 2.7 As explained in Chapter 5, at this stage there are no suitable or achievable sites for a Garden Town or Village within the District that could deliver housing during the Local Plan Review period. However, this is likely to be an option that is more realistic for the next Local Plan period and should therefore be developed further.
- 2.8 In terms of the existing settlements, the evidence suggests (Annual Monitoring Report and Five-year Housing Land Supply Paper) that the market has not been delivering as many new

² The number of dwellings reflects the "Panel Yield (final)" box of the site assessment form which represents the final yield for the site.

homes in Yeovil, Chard, Crewkerne, Ansford & Castle Cary, Somerton and Ilchester as was predicted. This is largely due to the fact that large urban extensions take longer to masterplan and advance through the planning application process resulting in delays in delivery. In comparison, Wincanton, Langport/ Huish Episcopi, Milborne Port, South Petherton and in particular the rural settlements have been delivering a greater number of new homes than predicted.

2.9 Taking the above into account, four alternative spatial strategy options were identified, and these are described in more detail below.

2.10 It is important to remember that a large proportion of development proposed under each of the options is comprised of committed development (completions and sites with existing planning permission). It should also be noted that large scale growth proposed in Yeovil through the two SUEs, at the Chard Eastern Development Area and at the Crewkerne Key Site are a constant through all the options. They are allocated in the currently adopted Local Plan and the Council is committed to the delivery of development in these areas.

2.11 The variation between options therefore reflects the following:

- Where the market is delivering; and
- More or less growth directed towards the higher (The Principal Town (Yeovil), Primary market Towns and Local Market Towns) and lower (Rural Centres, Villages and Rural Settlements) order settlements.

2.12 The following assumptions are made in terms of higher and lower growth at settlements:

- **Yeovil Town Centre** - options for increased growth assume higher densities on the four town centre sites.
- **Yeovil other sites** - options for increased growth assume 25% more growth at sites on the edge of Yeovil and options for less growth a reduction on these sites by 50%.
- **Chard** - no scope for any significant additional growth and minimal opportunity to significantly reduce growth given the Chard Eastern Development Area. Options that propose lower growth assume that there would be no further allocations outside the CEDA.
- **Crewkerne** - options for higher growth include development at sites W/CREW/0006 (78 dwellings), W/CREW/0015 (10 dwellings), W/MERR/0011 (25 dwellings), W/MERR/0012 (8 dwellings), W/CREW/0027 (22 dwellings) and W/CREW/0028 (19 dwellings). Options for less growth assume development only on the smaller sites W/CREW/0024 and W/CREW/0012.
- **Ilminster** - options for higher growth include development at sites W/ILMI/0002 (42 dwellings), W/ILMI/0102 (44 dwellings), W/ILMI/0004 (41 dwellings) and W/ILMI/0005 (30 dwellings). Options for less growth assume only development at Canal Way (W/ILMI/0301), which has outline planning permission for 400 dwellings subject to s106.
- **Wincanton** - options for higher growth include development at sites E/WINC/0002 (19 dwellings), E/WINC/0004 (152 dwellings) and E/WINC/0007 (49 dwellings). Options for lower growth assume a reduced amount of development to the south west.
- **Ansford and Castle Cary** - options for higher growth include development at sites E/ANSF/0012 (140 dwellings), E/ANSF/0500 (12 dwellings) and E/CACA/1101 (81 dwellings). Options for lower growth assume reduced level of growth to the North West.
- **Langport and Huish Episcopi** - options for higher growth include development at N/HUEP/0002 (16 dwellings). Options for lower growth assume development only at the smaller site (N/HUEP/0001) within settlement boundary.
- **Somerton** - options for higher growth include development at sites N/SOME/0007 (130 dwellings), N/SOME/0800 (10 dwellings) and N/SOME/0002 (80 dwellings). Options for lower growth assume reducing the scale of growth by half at N/SOME/0014.

- **Bruton** - options for higher growth include development at sites E/BRUT/0002 (58 dwellings) and E/BRUT/0008 (84 dwellings). Options for less growth assume development only at the smaller site E/BRUT/0006.
- **Ilchester** - options for higher growth include an increased scale of development at site E/ILCH/0002. Options for lower growth assume 50% less development at site E/ILCH/0002.
- **Martock and Bower Hinton** - options for higher growth include development at sites N/MART/0010B (35 dwellings), N/MART/0035 (140 dwellings), N/MART/0013 (18 dwellings) and N/MART/0025 (37 dwellings). Options for lower growth assume less growth (around 50% less) at sites to the north west.
- **Milborne Port** - options for higher growth include development at sites E/MIPO/0014 (48 dwellings), E/MIPO/0800 (46 dwellings) and E/MIPO/0003 (70 dwellings). Options for lower growth assume delivery only at E/MIPO/0023 as there is outline permission pending for 65 dwellings.
- **South Petherton** - options for higher growth include development at N/SOPE/0016 (57 dwellings). Option for lower growth include development only at the smaller site N/SOPE/0001/10.
- **Villages** - Options for higher growth include roughly all the suitable, available and achievable sites at the villages identified through the HELAA. Option for lower growth assume half the level of development at these settlements.
- **Rural Settlements** - Options for higher growth include assume a higher level of windfall at these rural settlements. Options for lower growth assume half the level of growth.

Option 1: Preferred Option

- 2.13 This option seeks to focus housing and economic growth in Yeovil, as the Principal Town, and the Primary Market Towns. In recognition of the rural nature of the District, some growth is supported in the Local Market Towns, Rural Centres, Villages and Rural Settlements. This is in order to ensure more sustainable and self-contained communities that are better placed to offer a range of opportunities to all of their residents. It is intended the overall approach will support the retention of strong, vibrant and healthy communities.

Option 2: Market led option

- 2.14 This option is market led reflecting where new homes have recently been delivered in the district. It involves reduced delivery at Yeovil, Chard, Crewkerne, Ansford & Castle Cary, Somerton and Ilchester; and increased delivery in Wincanton, Landport & Huish Episcopi, Milborne Port, South Petherton, the Villages and Rural Settlements.

Option 3: More growth in the higher order settlements and less in the lower order settlements

- 2.15 This option increases the level of growth at Yeovil as the Principal Town, Primary Market Towns and Local Market Towns and reduced growth in the Rural Centres, Villages and Rural Settlements.

Option 4: Less growth in the higher order settlements and more in the lower order settlements

- 2.16 This option reduces the level of growth at Yeovil as the Principal Town, Primary Market Towns and Local Market Towns and increases the level of growth directed to the Rural Centres, Villages and Rural Settlements.

- 2.17 **Table 2.2** on the following page sets out the four options in more detail.

Table 2.2 The reasonable spatial strategy alternatives

	Option 1: Preferred Option	Option 2: Market led	Option 3: More growth in higher order settlements	Option 4: More growth in the lower order settlements
Completions	1,179	1,179	1,179	1,179
Permissions	5,813	5,813	5,813	5,813
Total	6,992	6,992	6,992	6,992
Yeovil existing SUEs	1,565	1,565	1,565	1,565
Yeovil Town Centre	400	400	600	400
Yeovil other sites	922	461	1,152	461
Yeovil Total	2,887	2,426	3,317	2,426
Chard	1,490	1,342	1,490	1,342
Crewkerne	480	110	642	110
Ilminster	720	720	877	400
Wincanton	220	440	440	110
Primary Market Towns Total	2,910	2,612	3,449	1,962
Ansford and Castle Cary	161	80	394	80
Langport and Huish Episcopi	180	196	196	80
Somerton	140	70	360	70
Local Market Towns Total	481	346	950	230
Bruton	65	65	5	207
Ilchester	200	100	100	900
Martock and Bower Hinton	210	210	105	440
Milborne Port	140	304	65	304
South Petherton	55	112	10	112
Local Market Towns Total	670	791	285	1,963
Villages Total	722	1,070	361	1,070
Rural Settlements Total	876	976	488	976
Total number of dwellings	15,538	15,213	15,842	15,619
% over OAN (14,322)	8%	6%	11%	9%

Summary alternatives appraisal findings

- 2.18 Summary appraisal findings are presented within **Table 2.3** below. The appraisal table comprises a row for each of the objectives that make up the SA Framework (see **Table 1**). Within each row the alternatives are categorised in terms of potential to result in 'significant effects' (using **red/ green**) and also ranked in order of relative performance (with '=' used to denote instances where the alternatives perform on a par, i.e. it not possible to differentiate between them). If an option is ranked as 1 then it is preferred to an option that is ranked 2. Please note that the rank is not linked to the potential for a significant effect.

Table 2.3: Summary appraisal of the spatial strategy options

Summary findings and conclusions				
SA Theme	Categorisation and rank			
	Option 1: Preferred option	Option 2: Market led	Option 3: More growth in the higher order settlements	Option 4: More growth in the lower order settlements
Communities	1	3	2	4
Economy and Employment	2	3	1	3
Health and Equalities	1	3	2	4
Transport and Movement	2	3	1	4
Energy and Climate Change	2	3	1	4
Water resources, Quality and Flooding	=	=	=	=
Soil and Land	=	=	=	=
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	=	=	=	=
Landscape and Townscape	1	3	2	3
Historic Environment	1	3	2	3

- 2.19 The appraisal found that there is little to differentiate between the options with regard to the water environment, soil and biodiversity related themes. All of the options are likely to have a significant long term residual negative effect as a result of the loss of greenfield and agricultural land.
- 2.20 Options 1 and 3 perform more positively against SA themes relating to communities, health, economy, transport and climate change compared to Options 2 and 4 as they focus more growth at the higher order settlements where there is better access to existing employment and facilities/ services. This will help to reduce reliance on the private vehicle and encourage a modal shift; however, it is acknowledged that given the rural nature of the district the significance of this is uncertain at this stage.
- 2.21 Options 2 and 4 would result in a higher level of growth at lower order settlements where there is general poorer access to employment opportunities and facilities/ services. This is more likely to encourage the trend of private vehicle use and could also impact the more vulnerable and less mobile members of the community, such as the elderly.
- 2.22 Options 1 distributes growth based on the settlement hierarchy and was considered more likely to meet the needs of all communities in the district. It therefore performs more positively against SA themes relating to communities and health and equalities. Option 3 focuses a greater level of growth at the higher order settlements and is therefore less likely to meet the needs of the rural communities. Conversely Options 2 and 3 direct a higher level of growth to the lower order settlements and are less likely to meet the needs of Yeovil and the Principal Market Towns.

- 2.23 Option 1 directs development to areas that are less sensitive in landscape terms, as a result the appraisal found that it is not likely to have a significant long term residual negative effects on the landscape and historic environment SA themes. The other options would all result in development in areas that are more sensitive in landscape terms and are therefore more likely to have significant residual negative effects on the rural character and historic environment of the district.

The Council's response/ justification for the preferred approach

- 2.24 The following provides a brief explanation of the spatial strategy being advanced for the Local Plan Review including the reasons for not following alternative spatial options that are potentially available.
- 2.25 The following provides a brief explanation of the spatial strategy being advanced for the Local Plan Review including the reasons for not following alternative spatial options that are potentially available.
- 2.26 Option 1 is the preferred option as it reflects the settlement hierarchy and focuses housing and economic growth in Yeovil, as the Principal Town, and the Primary Market Towns. In recognition of the rural nature of the District, some growth is supported in the Local Market Towns, Rural Centres, Villages and Rural Settlements. This is in order to ensure more sustainable and self-contained communities that are better placed to offer a range of opportunities to all of their residents. It is intended the overall approach will support the retention of strong, vibrant and healthy communities.
- 2.27 The Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (2018) identifies sufficient suitable, available and achievable sites, through housing and mixed use development, to deliver the quantum of growth required to meet South Somerset's local housing needs.
- 2.28 Whilst the focus of growth concentrates on Yeovil and the Market Towns, if very little or no growth were directed towards Rural Centres, Villages and Rural Settlements, there would be a failure to provide the full range and mix of new housing and employment opportunities required across the District. This would likely lead to increased house prices in rural locations, making homes even less accessible to the wider market, and consequently resulting in less balanced and less sustainable rural communities overall.
- 2.29 The introduction of a Villages category of settlement aims to direct growth away from the smaller Rural Settlements. This approach seeks to reduce the demand for growth in less sustainable places and encourages growth where there is a greater concentration of services and facilities. It is considered this results in a more balanced settlement hierarchy.
- 2.30 Employment growth in rural locations is focussed on the main transport corridors, maximising the potential of the A303/A358 to the economy.
- 2.31 The market led option (Option 2) has not been progressed. Ongoing monitoring of the adopted South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 has identified that housing delivery in the Market Towns and Rural Settlements of the district remains strong. Indeed, delivery is ahead of target and greater than could be envisaged at this point in time. Conversely, new housing in many of the District's larger settlements has not been delivered at the rate anticipated by the Local Plan.
- 2.32 However, it is anticipated these trends will not continue over the longer term. Planning applications for the development of the Yeovil SUEs are now reaching determination stage and the Council is, through its Council Plan 2016-2021 and Annual Action Plan, seeking to accelerate housing delivery, particularly by focussing on enabling the planned large-scale housing growth at Yeovil, Chard and Crewkerne.
- 2.33 Such policy measures should assist in the move away from a market led option which, if left unchecked, would continue to focus growth in more rural parts of the District and could result in unsustainable patterns of development emerging whereby new homes and employment opportunities are located away from essential services and infrastructure. This would result in

significant negative impacts on the natural and built environment of South Somerset which we all value.

- 2.34 For similar reasons Option 4 (More growth in the lower order settlements) has also been rejected as it would result in unsustainable patterns of development whereby new homes and employment opportunities are located away from essential services and infrastructure.
- 2.35 More growth in Yeovil, Primary Market Towns and Local Market Towns and less in the lower order settlements (Option 3) has also been rejected. While this would result in more sustainable patterns of development compared to Options 2 and 4 there is the potential for significant impacts on the landscape and historic environment around the higher order settlements.
- 2.36 A new Garden Town/ Village has been given consideration through plan-making and the process; however, it is not considered a realistic or reasonable option at this stage. Such proposals require significant master-planning and investment including funding from the Government; they also take a long time to deliver.
- 2.37 Given that councils are expected to maintain a five-year supply of deliverable housing land and the Housing Delivery Test imposes penalties on councils where delivery is below the annual housing target, it is now more important than ever to ensure a constant supply of readily available sites.
- 2.38 At this time, the designation of a Garden Town or Village cannot be seen as a realistic alternative to developing sites elsewhere in the District. The Council is able to identify enough sites to meet identified housing need and has not made the decision to commit resources to actively pursue a Garden Village/ Town proposal. Nevertheless, the situation will be kept under review and the concept may be considered further in future subject to appropriate circumstances existing.

3. Appraisal findings at this stage

- 3.1 Part 2 of the SA Report answers the question - What are appraisal findings at this stage? - by presenting an appraisal of the Draft Local Plan Review, as currently presented in the Regulation 18 Preferred Options Document. Summary findings of the appraisal are presented below.

Table 3.1: Summary appraisal findings

SA objective	Likely residual effect	Commentary
Communities (including housing)	Significant positive effect	Overall, significant long-term positive effects are anticipated as a result of the spatial strategy identifying land to meet the forecasted housing and economic development needs of all the communities within South Somerset. The spatial strategy is considered likely to support reductions in existing inequalities with a focus on improving self-containment, town centre regeneration proposals in Yeovil, and net gains in community service and facility provisions overall. This is supported by the policy framework which seeks to ensure development delivers an appropriate balance of housing types, sizes and tenures.
Economy and employment	Significant positive effect	Overall, long-term significant positive effects are anticipated given the identification of new employment land and expected delivery of new jobs, supporting the economic vitality and viability of the district. In line with the FEMA analysis (2017) considerable focus is placed on the future economic role and function of Yeovil and the A303 corridor, and to address existing viability issues this is delivered alongside focused regeneration at Yeovil, Chard and Wincanton Town Centres. Given evidence indicating that expansion, intensification and change of use have historically provided relatively high levels of net additional floorspace, this approach is also supported by the proposed policy framework. The Local Plan Review also recognises the role of agri-businesses and tourism in South Somerset and provides support for rural diversification and further growth of the tourism economy. The multifaceted approach to supporting and sustaining economic vitality and viability is likely to realise significant benefits in the long-term.
Health and equalities	Significant positive effect	Overall, the delivery of the Local Plan Review will benefit residents through providing housing, employment, infrastructure, facilities, and services as set out within the IDP (2015/2016). Positive effects on the district's main settlement are also anticipated through the delivery of Policy TC1 (Yeovil Town Centre Regeneration Sites), Policy TC2 (Development in the Designated Yeovil Town Centre) and TC3 (Chard Town Centre Regeneration Site). The regeneration sites will be underpinned by high quality urban design and placemaking principles; strengthening the roles of the centres as vibrant, attractive environments which promote self-containment. On balance, it is appropriate to conclude that the Local Plan Review would have significant positive long-term effects in terms of improving the health and wellbeing of residents and reducing inequalities.
Transport and movement	Minor negative effect	On balance, while it is considered that the impact of proposed development on the transport network is likely to be mitigated to some extent, given the rural nature of the district there is still likely to be some residual minor long term negative effects against this SA Theme, i.e. in terms of accessibility and encouraging the use of sustainable travel.
Energy and climate change	Minor negative effect	On balance, while there is the potential for both positive and negative effects, the overall level of growth proposed through the Local Plan is likely to lead to a residual minor negative effect on the Climate Change

SA objective	Likely residual effect	Commentary
		and Energy SA theme, predominantly as a result of increased pressures on infrastructure affecting per capita emissions.
Water resources, quality and flooding	Neutral effect	The appraisal has identified numerous implications arising from the spatial strategy proposed in the Local Plan Review including a need for extensive flood mitigation schemes in some allocated sites prior to development. The policy framework provides a solid basis for protection and should manage potential impacts arising in relation to flood risk and water resources and recognises the need for close consultation and collaboration with relevant water stakeholders. On balance, it is appropriate to conclude residual neutral effects at this stage, i.e. it is not possible to conclude positive or negative effects on the baseline.
Soil and land	Significant negative effect	Whilst focused redevelopment of brownfield sites and town centre regeneration will support the delivery of positive effects with regards to the efficient use of land, it is still anticipated overall that the spatial strategy proposed through the Local Plan Review will lead to residual significant negative effects. This is resulting from significant losses of greenfield land and agricultural land (including best and most versatile agricultural land) particularly significant within the SUEs.
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Minor negative effect	Overall, the spatial strategy avoids development that may significantly affect designated biodiversity, performing positively in this respect. Despite this, there is an abundance of priority habitats and these habitats are placed under pressure with the growth proposed through the Local Plan Review. Whilst opportunities for positive enhancements have been identified through the appraisal, given the potential for increased disturbance, pollution, and fragmentation, an overall minor negative effect is anticipated at this stage.
Landscape and townscape	Minor negative effect	Overall, the proposed spatial strategy is likely to have a negative effect on the landscape, particularly rural character in the areas where the SUEs and large-scale development are proposed. Local Plan policies seek to ensure that development retains and enhances the key landscape areas, and the overall landscape character and rural setting, to reduce the extent and significance of the inevitable effects of the required growth. Despite this, it is predicted that the Local Plan has the potential for a residual minor negative effect on the landscape, primarily from areas of larger scale growth.
Historic environment	Minor negative effect	Overall, whilst development proposed through the Local Plan Review will inevitably change the landscape and townscapes of areas within South Somerset, the Local Plan policies and supporting Historic Environment Strategy seek to ensure that development retains and enhances the significance of the historic environment and heritage assets and their settings (including designated and non-designated sites). This is also considered alongside the proposed access and infrastructure improvements, as well as public realm enhancements and the delivery of new open spaces which will indirectly positively contribute to the historic environment by means of delivering a high-quality built environment. Protection is also provided to ensure that development appropriately considers archaeology as a prominent historic asset within the district. The policies are likely to reduce the extent of the negative effects identified, however the overall impact remains uncertain at this stage as it is ultimately dependent on successful design, layout and integration. Overall, it is likely that development will lead to a residual minor negative effect given the scale of growth proposed within a rural historic setting, as well as minor positive effects as a result of regeneration efforts focused within Yeovil Town Centre.

- 3.2 Overall the spatial strategy and policy framework is considered likely to lead to both positive and negative effects with regards to the SA objectives.
- 3.3 Significant positive effects are considered likely for SA objective relating to communities, primarily as result of identifying land to meet identified housing needs, providing and maintaining a 5-year housing land supply, and delivering an appropriate balance of housing types, sizes and tenures, including affordable housing in line with affordable housing needs evidenced in the SHMA. The spatial strategy further identifies employment sites which will contribute to meeting the forecasted increase in the total number of jobs in the FEMA over the plan period, supporting the economic vitality and viability of the district and delivering minor positive effects in this respect.
- 3.4 Town centre regeneration in Yeovil, Chard and Wincanton will also support the delivery of significant positive effects, retaining and enhancing the service roles of these areas and maximising levels of self-containment. The development proposed through the spatial strategy is anticipated to reduce inequalities and support health and wellbeing, delivering significant positive effects in this respect. The spatial strategy targets areas of higher deprivation within Yeovil, Chard, Crewkerne, Ilton and Martock and Bower Hinton, and an overall net gain in community service and facility provisions and open/ green spaces is anticipated.
- 3.5 Growth is targeted within existing settlements which will be a focus for sustainable transport and infrastructure improvements, however, given the level of growth proposed and rural nature of the plan area, residual minor long-term negative effects are anticipated overall in relation to transport and movement, and climate change and energy.
- 3.6 Whilst the potential for both positive and negative effects for water resources and water quality are identified, it is anticipated overall that a residual neutral effect on the baseline can be achieved.
- 3.7 The most dominant and significant negative effects ultimately relate to the loss of greenfield land and high-quality agricultural land within the Plan area, with many greenfield sites allocated in the Local Plan Review. This will significantly affect the SA objective for land and soil, and residual minor negative effects are also anticipated with regards to landscape character and historic landscapes in this respect.
- 3.8 One recommendation is made with respect to policy provisions, seeking enhanced protections for intrinsically dark skies and areas of tranquillity.

4. Next steps and monitoring

4.1 Part 3 of the Interim SA Report explains the next steps in the plan-making/ SA process.

Next steps

- 4.2 The Interim SA Report will accompany the Preferred Options document for public consultation in June 2019. Any comments received will be reviewed and then taken into account as part of the iterative plan-making and SA process.
- 4.3 The representations received along with further evidence base work, including further SA work, will inform the development of the Publication Plan (Regulation 19), which is scheduled to be published for consultation in 2020. An updated SA Report will accompany the Publication Plan for consultation.

Monitoring

- 4.4 Monitoring measures will be established within the final SA Report to address the potential significant effects associated with the Regulation 19 version of the plan. No measures have been identified at this stage, as the Plan is yet to be finalised.